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Democratic Leaders Announce Iraq, Veterans Proposal

WASHINGTON D.C. â€” Today, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Appropriations Committee Chairman Dave Obey (D-WI), Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Murtha (D-PA), and Armed Services Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) held a press conference to announce a response to the President's war time supplemental funding request.

Their proposal would:

- Â· Redirect more resources to the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan,
- Â· Attack the neglect of returning troops and veterans who are badly in need of healthcare, and

- Set a timeline for bringing the United States participation in Iraq's civil war to an end.

America needs to be fighting the right war in the right place. This proposal would add \$1.2 billion to the President's request to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

It adds three and a half billion dollars to end the disgraceful neglect of our soldiers who have answered their country's call and now have a right to call upon their country to provide them with the tools they need to overcome their injuries and reclaim their lives. It focuses funds on traumatic brain injury, post traumatic stress disorder, and improving our military hospitals and veterans hospitals to avoid the disgraceful problems that have occurred at Walter Reed.

To deal with other needs of our troops, the bill provides an additional:

- \$1.4 billion to fully cover the shortfall in funds for the Basic Allowance for Housing, and
- \$3.1 billion to fully fund 2007 needs for Base Realignment and Closure.

In order to minimize the burdens and maximize the security of our troops, the proposal would

direct the President to adhere to the military's own basic guidelines for:

- Â· Unit readiness,
- Â· Length of time they can be deployed in Iraq, and
- Â· The time they are entitled to remain at home before they return.

The bill grants the President the authority to depart from his own military's guidelines- all he has to do is give himself a waiver and face the country with a report explaining why.

To pressure Iraqi leaders to make the compromises necessary to end the chaos that has resulted from their lack of performance to date, the proposal establishes a timeline for ending U.S. participation in Iraq's civil war.

- By July 1st, 2007 the President must certify that Iraq is making meaningful and substantial progress in meeting political and military benchmarks including a militia disarmament program and a plan that equitably shares oil revenues among all Iraqi factions. If he does not certify - troops must begin immediate redeployment and U.S. troop involvement in the Iraq civil war must be completed by December 2007 (180 days).

- By October 1st, the President must certify that Iraqis have achieved key benchmarks. If he does not make the second certification, troops must begin immediate redeployment to be completed by March of 2008 (180 days).

- Even if he makes both certifications, the Administration must start redeploying the U.S. Military from Iraq by March 1, 2008, and complete the redeployment by August of 2008 (180 days).

In addition to Iraq, the proposal includes:

Â· \$2.5 billion to address urgent homeland security needs including aviation (explosive detection systems, advanced passenger screening, and air cargo screening), port, container and border security, and

Â· \$1 billion for pandemic flu preparedness, to begin the purchase of vaccines needed to protect us from a global pandemic.

On the domestic front, the bill addresses a number of needs that the administration has left unmet including:

Â· \$2.9 billion of additional funding for Gulf Coast recovery efforts,

Â· State Children's Health Insurance Program, \$735 million to eliminate shortfalls in 14 states, fully offset in accordance with pay-go rules,

• \$400 million to partially restore cuts in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program,

• Wildfire Suppression activities, \$500 million, at the Forest Service and Interior Department and

• a scaled down, reformed agriculture disaster program, \$4.3 billion, that would only assist those farmers who have met their responsibility to purchase crop assistance.

This bill meets every possible obligation for our troops, and most importantly, in contrast to the President who would leave us with an open ended obligation, it sets clear benchmarks, with a responsible and orderly timeline for ending U.S. military participation in the Iraqi civil war.

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